

Peter Messick: This is Peter Messick, recording Hollis Shaw on October the tenth.

Hollis Shaw: Good morning, Peter.

Peter Messick: Well, could you tell me about your community? You grew up in Durham, is that correct?

Hollis Shaw: Yes. I was born in Durham, and I grew up in a section that at that time was called the West End, and it is now called the Lyon Park section. As a matter of fact, it's a little smaller than it was geographically when I grew up, and I was right near the elementary school, within two blocks of the elementary school. And the elementary school was an all Black elementary school, Black teachers, Black principal, Black students, and the community abutted on two ends—I guess on four sides it abutted the White community.

Hollis Shaw: On one side there was Forest Hills, The other part abutted part of Kent Street and then there was a part that touched on the university, Duke University Drive, I guess. Of course when I grew up in Durham, there were probably seven or eight distinct Black communities. And to get from one to the other, you always had to go through a White community and West End was no different.

Peter Messick: Well, can you describe your family life?

Hollis Shaw: Well, we had a rather extensive family there in the West End because I had grandmothers, grandparents. My mother's mother was alive, and my father's mother and grandmother and stepfather were alive. I had aunts and uncles. No first cousins, but a lot of other relatives, and they took pride in their ownership. My grandmother owned a house, my uncle owned a house, a second uncle owned a house, three houses in a row on one street. It was Rock Street. Then my grandmother owned a house and my Aunt Laci owned a house. My Aunt Ember. As a matter of fact, I don't think—we may have been the only ones that rented, most of my relatives owned their own homes then. Small modest homes, it was a blue collar working community.

Peter Messick: Were you all in the same community?

Hollis Shaw: All in the West End. Probably about eight or ten homes owned by the family. A religious group of people who attended Sunday school and attended church on Sunday. We put a premium on education, believing it was a way to get beyond any kinds of barriers that you might face in life.

Peter Messick: Was your family—how long has it been in Durham? Can you me give your best idea?

Hollis Shaw: Well, on my mother's side, my grandmother moved to Durham with my mother and her other two daughters around 1912. They moved from Chapel Hill. On my father's side, they were in Durham by the time my father was eleven. I'm not certain when they moved to Durham, my father was born in 1898 so that

by 1909, and probably 1907, they were in Durham. They moved from Garner. So neither family came from very far away, Garner's just on the other side of Raleigh.

Peter Messick: Well, let me see. What do you remember of your grandparents occupation?

Hollis Shaw: On my mother's side, my grandmother worked for a family that owned a florist. I think it was Rolls, R-O-L-L-S, Florist. My grandmother, my father's mother did not work. My grandfather on my father's side worked. He worked at Liggett and Myers, and I remember he liked to drink beer. It was a very interesting thing, on Morehead Avenue there was a grocery store, a guy named Wilkerson who owned the store, was this White store owner, and they had large barrels filled with, we call them soda crackers, they're just Saltines. And he always had a wheel of cheese on the counter. This is a little mom-and-pop grocery store. The men could go in that store and buy beer and stand there at the counter and drink it, and reach in the barrel and get crackers or eat cheese, et cetera.

Hollis Shaw: And it was an integrated setting. So anybody who walked in—it wasn't so much an integrated setting except that he didn't make any distinction between who put the hand in the barrel to get cheese, or I mean crackers or cheese, and everybody stood up at the bar. And my grandfather used to go there, and that was probably about six blocks from where my grandparents lived. And he would go there and have his fill with beer and then he'd come home on a Saturday afternoon and sit on the back porch and play his—I want to say harmonic, it's not that. The clarinet.

Peter Messick: Clarinet.

Hollis Shaw: Mournful sounds, I remember that, and both of them, one grandmother was very religious on my mother's side. And I think that if you talk to any family member, they would talk about her in terms of her goodness, she never saw evil in anyone.

Hollis Shaw: Now, the Rolls family she worked for, and I'm talking about 1940 maybe, as late as 1940, paid her five dollars a week and she frequently walked to work and walked from work. An aunt of mine lived with her and that aunt was a very assertive, very aggressive woman who could spend a dollar, could loan that dollar out and still have it. And she retired my grandmother, she didn't want her to work in that, because we as kids hated it. I don't think I ever heard my mother say anything about it. Even then, I know there was exploitation. I mean, sometimes they bring her home and she was, I don't know what, when she was retired she was probably in her fifties, and the little kids always referred to her by the first name.

Hollis Shaw: It started without any dignity, except that was a pattern. And my grandmother accepted it, but my aunt didn't. And so she said to retire, "I can afford to give you the same kind of money by staying at home." So she stopped working in the early forties. I don't remember exactly what year.

Peter Messick: How old was she then?

Hollis Shaw: In her fifties? And that's interesting because she didn't qualify for social security and neither

did my father's mother qualify for social security. And there were a lot of people in the community, older people who I recall who worked and worked and worked until they just simply couldn't work. They had to be supported by family or kin because there was no support. And during the time there was in each county, I don't know that—in the county of Durham, there was what was known as a poor house.

Hollis Shaw: And I remember going to a play on a Sunday afternoon at Lyon Park school, and the name of the play was "Over the Hill to the Poor House". And didn't understand it then, but some of the older people came out of the play crying because it was [indistinct 00:08:53]. I thought it was a funny play, but I think it must have been a morbid play. But if you didn't have funds then that's where you ended up. The government took care of you by sending you to a place where older people who were indigent lived. And I suspect nearly every county in the state had it. I don't know that.

Peter Messick: And you would actually take up residence in the poorhouse?

Hollis Shaw: Very much like you do in a nursing home now when you're sick and can't afford to be at home.

Peter Messick: Well, can you tell me about your parents occupations or—?

Hollis Shaw: Both my mom and dad worked for the American Tobacco Company. My father was a semi-skilled worker. He was called a sacker. The American Tobacco Company, as you probably know, made Bull Durham tobacco. And that came in a little sack and people rolled their own. There was a machine that I guess extruded tobacco and you had to put the sack under there and pull it off and tied and just constantly working. But you had to have good coordination, hand eye coordination and stamina to work that job. And he worked the job, so he was making, I guess, better than the average worker's wage because of that occupation. My mother worked there, and I don't know what she did in her formative years as an employee, but eventually she was just a person who swept around various parts of the factory.

Hollis Shaw: During the war years, World War II, my father left and went to Sparrow's Point. He went to Baltimore and worked at Sparrow's Point, which is a shipyard, defense work. There was a great call throughout the nation for defense workers because we were producing equipment and elements for the war effort. So one might assume that a person who goes to do that is doing something that's honorable. Well after the war, when he came back the American Tobacco Company would not hire him because he left them and went away. So he ended up working at Duke University in the housekeeping department, Duke University Hospital.

Hollis Shaw: And my mom retired from the American Tobacco Company in, I guess '72, the same year my father died. Well, maybe she retired in '73 the next month. And incidentally they held a reunion, the American Tobacco Company, just a couple of weeks ago, I think it was October the fifth at the Duke Homestead here, of factory workers. Very interesting. I guess it's the age of nostalgia, everybody's having reunions.

Peter Messick: The current situation with tobacco, it may well be.

Hollis Shaw: And my father was a prolific reader and he brought home magazines that people didn't normally see in our community. Police Gazette, for example, recalled him bring it home. There was a plethora of Black newspapers. The Journal and Guide was one of the papers out on Norford. He used to bring that home. He also brought home the Carolina Times and something like the Sporting News. So we saw things I think that other kids didn't see. I had an uncle, his brother, lived in Philadelphia and he worked for the Naval Yard.

Hollis Shaw: And he used to send a lot of interesting things home that we had, I think other kids didn't have. Some simple things like a pencil sharpener, the kind you saw in school that you can mount to the wall and kids just come in next door, come and sharpen a pencil, those kinds of things. And an aunt who worked at Duke University in the dormitories. She was a great aunt. Apparently the dormitories had maid service years ago, I guess in the forties. I don't know if you have that now. Probably have to clean your own room now.

Peter Messick: Yes, they take care of everything else.

Hollis Shaw: But they used to do the rooms and everything and students everywhere, they would just leave stuff, so we always had plenty of school supplies. And the other things we got a lot of, quite a few tennis rackets and a softball glove, a baseball glove or a tennis ball. And every year she would come home with that kind of stuff. And we were not the only children, but we were the closest children to her. So my sister and I got a lot of stuff that came right from Duke University.

Peter Messick: Can you tell me, can you remember any important issues that occurred in your community while you were growing up? Community battles or—?

Hollis Shaw: Well, probably the one that most people would remember had to do with the church. Working class neighborhood, probably fully half the community living in rental houses and some of those houses, shotgun houses, but dual shotguns. Three rooms on this side and three rooms in their house on that side. And the way people would talk is that—we lived adjoining to the Grahams, if you lived in the left side, they lived in the right, they call it adjoining two houses. Adjoining rooms or something like that.

Peter Messick: Sounds like a duplex.

Hollis Shaw: That's what it is. A duplex. But they were shotgun structured, not necessarily shotgun houses, because a shotgun house, you could stand at the front door and look out the back door, but sometimes they set—

Peter Messick: [indistinct 00:15:09] Shotgun.

Hollis Shaw: Right, right. They would set the doors apart. But essentially that kind of housing, about half the community lived in that kind of house. So it was not a very affluent neighborhood, but at some point in the early fifties, part of the church, Second Baptist Church which was on a corner of Morehead and Kent Street,

had a schism. Half the membership wanted to retain the minister, another half wanted to get rid of the minister. Big controversy, families stopped speaking to each other. Some families moved their membership to a church outside of the community. As a matter of fact, the family that lived right next door to my grandmother did that, just went all the way across town to church.

Hollis Shaw: The police had to be called and eventually the church was padlocked for a day or so. And that's critical because the church is the center of the Black community. Even today it's very, very influential in the Black community. And eventually half the population moved four blocks down the street and built a church equally as large as that church that I come from. That was probably the most controversial thing that happened in the community when I was growing up.

Hollis Shaw: Some of the other things I would not necessarily know about. For example, I came back here 1959 I went to grad school, so I was here for the first year of the civil rights movement. But that wasn't a controversial thing in the community, that was like a unifying factor, pulled people together. But this pulled people apart and some families that are still estranged from each other because of that split up in that church.

Peter Messick: Well, you mentioned this elementary school in your neighborhood. Did you begin your education there? And I know that you attended some type of boarding school.

Hollis Shaw: The elementary school, Lyon Park is still there and the church that my family belonged to, that Second Baptist Church has just recently acquired that school because the school has been vacant for a number of years and they're going to make a community center out of it. But I went to that school the first through the sixth grade, and then the process was to transfer across town to Hillside.

Peter Messick: Can you describe differences between your education and your parents' education?

Hollis Shaw: My dad only went to about the third grade, even though he was a prolific reader. And he used to do things like, he kept a diary too. Not after he got married, but before he got married he kept a diary. We found some of the diaries where he has sporadic interest in. He didn't write every day, but one of the cryptic things in a diary we saw not too long ago said something like—he was in Baltimore at the time, woke up this morning with five big ones, had a quarter at sundown or something like that, indicating that he—we don't know whether five big ones were five one-dollar bills or five five-dollar bills. But another entry talked about the time he purchased a fish and cooked it for breakfast, ate half of it, left it on the table, cat got fish. That kind of stuff.

Hollis Shaw: So he had an interest in writing and I don't know if you even heard that kind of stuff, but you certainly learn it from your parents. And he knew the words to many songs, he made up songs. He played a ukulele. Sometimes he would sit and sing, and he would have the right tune but he would just didn't know the words, so he'd simply make up words to songs. But in third grade, and my mother probably went to the sixth grade, but by far he was the more educated one. But neither one went to junior high school.

Hollis Shaw: And I guess that's why they believe so strongly in education because they believed that education was a way of getting out of the level of poverty that we were in. And the most admired people that we knew were probably the teachers over at that little school. And my mother and my aunt, I guess were intelligent looking and very good dressers, and they were frequently mistaken for teachers. And that would just make their day.

Peter Messick: So you went to Hillside and that was a segregated school time too?

Hollis Shaw: Hillside was segregated, yes. I went a year there. Then I went to boarding school.

Peter Messick: Now what boarding school was this?

Hollis Shaw: Lincoln Academy. It was twenty miles south west of Charlotte. Almost on the South Carolina, North Carolina line. Little town called Kings Mountain. Famous for revolutionary history. You know, you're a history major.

Peter Messick: Nice little park down there.

Hollis Shaw: That's right.

Peter Messick: What made you decide to go to that school?

Hollis Shaw: I didn't decide. It was decided for me. It was during the war and people talk about working class families or working moms. That was the norm in my community, for mothers to work if there were jobs available. I can't recall a time when mothers in my community didn't work, but somehow during the war there were many more negative influences impacting on the environment, on the community and a lot of kids were finding jobs too, they'd drop out of school. I think there were three first grade classes that when I started to Lyon Park, and those classes probably averaged twenty-eight to thirty kids.

Hollis Shaw: I'm the only boy to finish high school out of those three classes. So the dropout was just simply devastating. And they were dropping out during the transition from sixth grade to seventh grade, tremendous number of youngsters dropped out. It's a new environment, there are new people to meet, mom and dad are away working. There's no one pushing the kid, no support, so my family wanted to get us out of that.

Hollis Shaw: So my sister had gone away to boarding school a couple years before me and my mom had a child when I was in the sixth grade, seventh grade, I had been an honor student and I went to Hillside and I just fell apart. I made straight Fs or Ds and my parents said, "Out of here." The boarding school the next year, I made straight As. So it was an effort to salvage us, both my oldest sister and I.

Hollis Shaw: In addition to that, they really believe that was the gateway to success, and I think we thought of success in terms of material things. It certainly was a way out of what they saw was working hard, doing

manual things. To get us off the streets too, because my sister particularly, she was associating with youngsters that my parents felt were not going to go anywhere. There was always this great fear that your daughter might get pregnant, a great fear that your son might do something to irritate someone White and get hurt.

Hollis Shaw: And Black parents, a lot of them practice what I would say, teaching kids survival skills. You teach them how to make the adjustment in an environment that was not very, very friendly. And you teach them to gather to themselves whatever skills they can to get past that environment. So I think they sent us the school to help us move beyond the level we were born into.

Peter Messick: Your older sister went to the same school?

Hollis Shaw: Yeah, And we went there forever. I mean, we were there for six years each. And indeed, when we leave here, we're going to go to Kernersville to visit some friends that we knew from boarding school. Our closest friends today are not college friends, but those who we grew up with in boarding school. And we have a friend in Kernersville who retired as Warden of the Hudson County Jail. He used to be warden of Essex County Jail in New Jersey, and he's been in Kernersville four or five years. And just this week his cousin who also went to boarding school with us and is from Brooklyn, born and bred in Brooklyn, but went to boarding school with us. She just bought house in Kernersville. So they're still out sort of tight little knitted group.

Peter Messick: How did your family manage to work out all the logistics of getting you down to Charlotte?

Hollis Shaw: Well, it's an extended family, so that it was not only my parents who took responsibility for the cost, it was my aunt, my grandmother, my uncles. And to be away in school and doing it successfully was like being an athlete. Even the kids in the community began to look at us differently. One of the things that happened initially is your speech pattern begins to change, as much the influence of the educational system, but probably more the influence of the students who were there.

Hollis Shaw: Fully half of the students who were in that boarding school were kids who grew up in Washington and North of Washington. So suddenly we are speaking like them. Kids who are dropping out of school suddenly begin to look at you differently, not in awe but in appreciation. "Oh, well he's going to do something in life. He's going to be somebody."

Hollis Shaw: And we had experiences that they didn't have. For example, we went to boarding school by way of train. There was this train, Southern Railway, I guess it was. Go from Durham to I don't know where, I probably made it up. Probably goes from Durham to Greensboro—change. We'd meet the kids coming down from Washington and we'd go to our school. Trains are so important to us that if you talked to someone who went to that boarding school, forty years out of that boarding school, they could tell you the time the trains left.

Hollis Shaw: And I did a survey when we had our first reunion, and we didn't have class reunions, we had

had school reunions because boarding schools have small classes. And in the newsletter, I asked the people if they remembered the train schedule and everybody remembered it. There was a train going home in the afternoon at 3:18 p.m. and one going home at night at 8:12 p.m.

Hollis Shaw: We took over trains the same way students take over planes today. I mean, if there were fifty of us on that train, you can believe we're making a lot of noise. We were irritating a lot of people. We were petting out in the public and we were just sort of running wild I guess but we had a good time. But that's how we traveled for the most part, by train. My aunt had a car, the one that lived with my grandmother that she retired her, and they would come down to visit us occasionally. We'd go in September, we'd have a break at Thanksgiving and sometimes the family would come down. We did not usually come home at Thanksgiving.

Hollis Shaw: Then we'd take the train home at Christmas, go back in January and again the year. As a matter of fact, it is such a nostalgic thing to remember, a pleasant thing to remember what we did that five or six years ago, probably twenty of us took a train from New York City down to Washington just to relive that spirit of having grown up as we were on the trains.

Peter Messick: Same atmosphere in the train?

Hollis Shaw: Well, much different, much better seat. I mean, we were on coal stokers. You could open the windows of trains then and cinders would blow right in on you. And of course, again, the cars were segregated and the dining cars were segregated and vendors came by selling sandwiches, et cetera. And people who travel always packed a lunch, at least Blacks who travel always packed to lunch and almost invariably it was a fried chicken. But that's how we got to school, and I don't know what the cost was. It wasn't very, very much at the time.

Peter Messick: Well, how did attending boarding school affect the rest of your career?

Hollis Shaw: Well—

Peter Messick: You already said—

Hollis Shaw: Parochial schools are, and it was parochial school, are always different from even just plain private schools because parochial schools believe that you should do something in your life to improve the human condition. Really say what it is, and they're so adamant about it they literally are—well, not literally, but they figuratively say to you, "Well, if you don't do something, go out and do something good, we'll break your leg." I mean, you have to go out and do something good. You have a responsibility beyond yourself.

Hollis Shaw: You have responsibility to try to succeed, but beyond that, you have a responsibility to do something that benefits humanity. So that was probably the main thing in boarding school that was a change in my life, I think in the lives of a lot of people, is that you'd not only have to try to reach as high as you can on a ladder, but you ought to be pulling somebody up behind you as you go up the ladder.



Hollis Shaw: And it was drummed into your head, drummed into your head. This school was run by the American Missionary Association, AMA. Congregational Church is what it was called, and there were a number of schools throughout the country that were congregational schools, are sponsored initially by that organization. Both boarding schools and colleges and they all had that service orientation to them. They all had—

Hollis Shaw: The boarding schools had for the most part, a college preparatory program. And most of the colleges were liberal arts colleges. So you almost had to go beyond a bachelor's degree to do anything. That probably is the greatest influence. The second, probably greatest influence is that it tied us into my lifelong friendship base with people who had other kinds of experiences than we'd had. People who grew up in various parts of the country that we could only dream about at the time we met them.

Hollis Shaw: So we had the advantage over the kids in our community. We had the advantage of experiencing things vicariously, so that I knew about the subways in New York City years before I ever saw a subway. I knew how cold it was from the youngsters talking in Chicago long before. And I knew that in [indistinct 00:32:41] Michigan, there was a house for the mentally ill because of a guy who came from that area. So we got a lot of kinds of things and experienced a lot of things through the lives of other people. And that's an enriching kind of thing, and sometimes an ennobling kind of thing depending on what the experience is.

Peter Messick: Sounds like you had kids from all over the United States. Is there a specific geographic area that school serving?

Hollis Shaw: No, from all over the United States.

Peter Messick: That's a little bit of a fun question, but what is your most memorial experience from school? Something that really sticks out in your mind.

Hollis Shaw: From that school?

Peter Messick: From that school.

Hollis Shaw: Oh man, there's so many. One of the things that we did my senior year, it was sort of a negative thing. Well, let me tell you a very positive thing. We didn't have a gym. We had a very small campus. We hadn't had a gym. We played basketball practice at the gym of a public school and our senior year, the team that was the host for the tournament, and it was probably the best team in the conference. My senior year, we had developed a habit of chewing orange peelings during a game, and I think that came from the fact I used to have terrible stage fright before a game or any other kind of thing. And I had started eating oranges and one day I just accidentally started chewing orange peels and it sort of settle my stomach and by the end of my senior year, the whole team was doing that.

Hollis Shaw: And we got to the gym for the tournament and I had forgotten the oranges. And some kid ran to the store and bought a dozen oranges and we just got out on a court in time, but everybody was stuffed with oranges and we had just a fantastic game. I mean, throw the ball up anywhere you want to, the ball would go in the basket that night and that's one of the kind of sports things they still talk about, the guys

Hollis Shaw: I went to school with. But a number of other things happened, we used to have a lot of social activities at the sporting school. As a matter of fact, there were a lot of private clubs very much like you have fraternities, except there was no secret handshake and it wasn't Greek. But we had a number of private clubs and organizations, and for some reason the administration prior to a new one coming in allowed us to have parties any night of the week.

Hollis Shaw: You could have a dance any night of the week, and our teachers literally lived with us, so you saw teachers twenty-four hours a day. And we had a new director who decided this was inappropriate, he was not going to tolerate it. And he just summarily stopped it. He didn't talk to the students or anything, he just stopped it. The students decided to strike.

Hollis Shaw: So we had flyers going around the campus and everybody decided on this particular day they would not go to school. Now we had a little business venture on the campus and that was a canteen, a room about the size of this room here where you could buy sodas and candies and cakes and pies, et cetera. And my roommate and I knew that the guy who ran—the students ran it, who ran the canteen, was not going to go to the school that day. He decided he'd be a part of the strike.

Hollis Shaw: So he and I decided we were not striking. So when that kid went on the strike, of course he was fired, we applied for the job and we got to canteen. So we were rolling in money, we had all kinds of money. Those were good experiences. Eventually our senior year, we also were able to talk a guy in town of giving us the cleaning concession. So I think I made much more money in high school than I made in college. I think the other thing that stands out about that school is that we had a relatively large number of people coming into that school from the outside for cultural activities and indeed the board—Peter, this is my wife, Dr. Shaw.

Dr. Shaw: Good morning.

Peter Messick: Good morning.

Hollis Shaw: Peter's a student in Paul Ortiz's class.

Dr. Shaw: If there's a Robert Finch calls, I'll be back within half hour.

Hollis Shaw: Who is Robert Finch?

Dr. Shaw: Someone calling to get some information on the board, of Connie Johnson.

Hollis Shaw: Oh, okay.

Dr. Shaw: So I'll be back.

Hollis Shaw: Okay.

Dr. Shaw: Okay. Good meeting you.

Hollis Shaw: The board of directors was for the most part, Northerners. I don't know anybody, any southerners on the board. You've heard of the NAACP, right? The executive director of the NAACP at that time was a man named Walter White. And Walter White's brother was on the board and there was a Mr. Brown on the board. And the Congregational Church was centered of course in New England. So other people were from—but I remember those two people distinctly, I remember Walter White's brother because—no, it wasn't Mr. Brown, it was Mr. Black. Walter White's brother was indistinguishable from anybody who was White.

Hollis Shaw: And Walter White during the '30s attended a trial in Scottsboro, Georgia of four or five Black guys who were accused of raping a white woman on a train. They were all transients, hobos I guess, but Walter White sat in that courtroom and observed that trial, kept notes, sent them back to the northern press and no one in that town ever knew that he was Black because he was biologically White, but culturally Black.

Hollis Shaw: And that has played an important part in the history of Durham that few people know about, that scenario. There is still in surrounding Durham, I don't know if you know this or not, surrounding Durham there are a number of little pockets of populations that are indistinguishable from the White population in terms of the way they look, but they are Black. There's a place outside of Burlington called Little Texas, a place here outside of Durham by Hamer, Rougemont.

Hollis Shaw: And a place from near where my wife comes from, Ahoskie, where you find that kind of ethnic thing. But what I started telling you, I remember those people coming from New England and I don't know what I thought New England was, but I thought it was a different country. Because it didn't say it came from Massachusetts et cetera, these people came from New England, said, "Jesus, why are they over here in our country? They came from New England." I remember that very well.

Hollis Shaw: But I also remember we used to have all these—we had a Lyceum committee and they brought in the cultural kinds of things, roaming troubadours and other kinds of artists who came to the place and we had something once a month. I guess the thing that really stands out by mind and stands out in the minds of a lot of the people who went there was the social decorum that we were taught. You had to, at least once a year attend a formal dance, and so the school gave one and you had to dress, It was black and white tie affair. And you had to really get dressed up and the girls were in gowns and the large dining hall would clear, set all the tables aside and decorated. And when we had our first reunion—and when you went to dinner at night, you had to wear a tie.

Peter Messick: There were some group dinners, I'm assuming.

Hollis Shaw: In the cafeteria. You had to wear a tie, and before each meal, the bell board would ring a large bell and it was a hand pull bell from the bell tower. And that bell would ring, I don't know, in the morning it'd ring at maybe six o'clock and then it'd ring again maybe at six-thirty, And then five of seven it would ring for five minutes. And if you were not in a dining hall when that bell finished, you could not have breakfast. It was that way for each meal, but in the evening it was the same way. We had to dress for the evening meal. When we had the first reunion, we had a dance in a building that the air conditioner had died in. And it was very, very hot. We were in Gastonia for that first reunion dance, I think.

Hollis Shaw: And everybody was dressed in shirt and tie, et cetera. And not a person, according to one of the instructors who made a comment from the floor, took that tie off. And it seems like a small kind of thing, but it was that kind of social decorum that we were taught that there's certain things you do properly and that certain kinds of dress identify you as someone. So that becomes a badge and a symbol.

Hollis Shaw: And that carried over for me when I was here in Durham in the summers. People in small towns have a tendency, at least in poor communities, not to mail bills in, but to go downtown as it were, and pay the light bill and the phone bill and the gas bill, what have you. And no matter how hot it was, when my mom sent me downtown I always wore shirt and tie because that was a symbol that you were different, you were somebody.

Hollis Shaw: And then in downtown Durham, of course there was a North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance company and there was a large number of Blacks there who were dressed as businessmen et cetera, so that social decorum became a kind of badge of importance also, for most of us. So we cloaked ourselves in those things, and even now you may go to church, I don't know this, but you may go to church dressed as you are now.

Peter Messick: Pretty close.

Hollis Shaw: A large number of young people do this. You won't find it at hardly any Black church in Durham, you will find the shirt and tie, et cetera. Not only tradition, I think historically it may have been probably the only time most of us had a chance to wear a shirt and tie is going to church because most of us did manual kinds of labor.

Hollis Shaw: But that formalism was one of the things that we were taught in boarding school and it became more than just a matter of decorum, it became sort of like a badge of distinction to be dressed like that. So there just a whole lot of things in boarding school that changed the way we thought and the way we acted. And it's experience that I wish more people had because it was certainly a motivating experience. And I'm certain that could have occurred in—